THE
Unreasonableness and Mischief
OF
ATHEISM.
A
SERMON
Preached before the
QUEEN
At *WHITE-HALL*,
On *Friday* the 30th of *March*, 1694.

By *W. Talbot*, D. D. and Dean of *Worcester*.

Published by Her Majesty's Command.

London, Printed for *Tho. Bennet*, at the *Half-Moon* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard, 1694.

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Psal. XIV. Ver. 1.

The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God.

THAT there is no God, no infinitely Wise, Powerful, Just, and Good Being, that at first made this World, does still administer and govern it, and will finally judge the rational part of it: That there is no First Cause of all things which is of it self, but that either there has been an infinite Succession of Natural Causes, or they have produced one another in a Circle; that is to say, according to the former, There have been infinite Men in the World before there was ever a one; and according to the latter, That *David* was not only the Father of *Solomon*, but the Son of *Solomon* also; nay mediately and remotely the Father and Son of himself.

Or, if there were a First Cause, that 'twas a necessary, brute, and unthinking Cause, which yet has produced rational, free, and thinking Agents, Effects which have Excellencies in them which were no way in the Cause from whence they proceeded.

Or, that this World was produced by a fortuitous concourſe of Atoms, That this Vaſt and Noble, Beautiful and Regular Structure, wherein all things are made according to Weight and Meaſure, all act orderly and conſtantly for ſome end, wherein appears the wiſeſt Contrivance, both in the Fabrick of the ſeveral Parts and of the whole, and the diſpoſal of all for the attainment of their ſeveral Ends, is the Work of blind Chance, which can neither ſee, nor Deſign, nor diſpoſe.

Or, if there were an Intelligent Being that firſt created it, that he abandon'd it as ſoon as he made it; and having once ſhut it out of his Hands, took no farther care, but left the Adminiſtration of it to Fortune or Fate.

Or, if he does concern himſelf in the Government of it, will never rectifie thoſe Abuſes which he ſees and permits in it; That he has no Rewards in ſtore to beſtow hereafter on thoſe who love and obey him, whom he yet ſuffers to be evilly intreated, and miſerable here, and many times ſo for his Sake and Service; nor will ever call to account, or puniſh thoſe who daily affront and provoke him, who yet meet with no other Returns for their Villainies here than Security, Proſperity, and the good Things of this Life.

Theſe are things ſo irrational and extravagant, that one would think it hardly poſſible to find any that are Fools enough to believe or ſay them, and would not expect to meet with any Diſcourſes againſt ſuch, for the ſame Reaſon that there have been no Laws made againſt ſome Crimes, which have been of

of ſo heinous a Nature that none cou'd be ſuppoſed capable of committing them.

But the Scripture ſuppoſes there are, and may be ſuch Fools, and our own unhappy Times afford too many Inſtances of them, who ridicule a God, and Providence, and Judgment to come; either deny his Exiſtence, or allow him to be no better than the *Gods of the Heathens, that have Eyes and ſee not, Ears and hear not:* One, to whom *Elijah*'s Sarcaſm concerning *Baal* may be applicable; that he is *Talking, purſuing; in a Journey; or, peradventure, he ſleeps*, when he ſhould obſerve the Actions of Men, or attend to the Services of his Votaries; who, having vilified their Maker, no wonder, debaſe his Workmanſhip, believe themſelves to be made up only of Matter, that as they live they ſhall die like Beaſts; their Bodies ſhall moulder into Duſt, their Souls be diſſolved into ſoft Air, and there's an end of them: Who have not only defaced in themſelves all Notions of Spiritual Beings, but make it their buſineſs to blot out all ſuch Impreſſions in others; and as they have debauch'd, and corrupted their own Reaſon and Faith, to aſſert and believe thoſe wild Opinions which their Luſts and Appetites ſuggeſt, and to acknowledge nothing in being beſides Matter and Motion, ſo labour to make a Party, and gain Proſelytes to their abſurd Opinions and Practices: *They conceive Wickedneſs; and, when they come abroad, they tell it*; it reſts not in their hearts, but with their tongues they ſpit about their Poiſon; and, with their infected breath, endeavour to ſpread the deadly Contagion where-ever they go: Who, to gain reputation and followers, pretend to

be

be the only free and impartial Reaſoners, the great Abettors of the Liberty of Humane Nature, that have no other end to ſerve, but the diſcovering the Weakneſs, and breaking off of thoſe Chains wherewith deſigning and intereſted Men had inſlav'd it.

Now if Fools will be ſetting up for the only Maſters of Thought; If the moſt abſurd Notions ſhall be vented for *Oracles of Reaſon*; If, not content to have fool'd themſelves in a Matter of the greateſt Concern, they are induſtrious to delude others; and, like the great *Abaddon*, reſtleſly endeavouring day and night to bring others into the ſame Condemnation with themſelves: It is certainly an Act of the greateſt Charity to them, as well as others, to make their Folly manifeſt to the World, to ſhew that they are the moſt unthinking Creatures that live in it; and that, whatever ſpecious Characters they aſpire to, or would be known by, there's none ſo juſtly belongs to them as that which the Spirit of God has given them in the Text: And the attempting this is my preſent Province.

I ſhall not go about to ſhew the Folly of disbelieving a God and Providence, by proving, That they are, or by anſwering the Objections to the contrary; not that the former are not fairly demonſtrable, or the latter too formidable to be encountred; but, I think, too frequent Undertakings to confute theſe, are too great an honouring of them, and make them look more conſiderable than they really are, as too frequent Attempts to prove thoſe may poſſibly be not of the beſt Conſequence to Religion: And beſides, the Doctrines that aſſert them have been ſo firmly eſtabliſh'd,

eſtabliſh'd, and the contrary Whimſies ſo ſhamefully baffled, both by Ancient and Modern Chriſtians, and, particularly, in ſome Diſcourſes publiſh'd in our own Language, That whoſoever can now complain for want of Evidence and Conviction, and call for more, will ſtill do ſo after the utmoſt that can be given him, and plainly declares he will not be ſatisfied.

And if Men are ſo reſolv'd, reſolv'd to be ſceptical as long as they can ſtart any little Cavil and ridiculous Scruple, and to ſubmit to no Conviction, but ſuch as the things to be prov'd are not capable of: If they will not believe a God unleſs we can demonſtrate him *à priori*! Nor acknowledge an Eternal, Independent, and Self-exiſting Being, unleſs we can prove him from his Cauſes: If they will not believe Matter of Fact, which happen'd long before their Time, without Evidence of Senſe; If they will not believe Spirits and immaterial Subſtances, unleſs they can ſee and feel them: the Man that ſhould attempt to prove them upon theſe Terms, would deſerve the Character of him that denies them. That therefore which I intend, is to ſhew,

That although all the Arguments that are urg'd for the proof of a God, a Providence, and a future Judgment, ſhould not be allow'd to come up to a Demonſtration: Tho' the Atheiſt has his Arguments againſt them, and the Sceptick his Scruples, which they think are not ſatisfactorily anſwered: Though they are not convinc'd of them, yet it is a very great Folly not to believe them, and to ſay, and perſuade others that there are no ſuch Things.

I ſpeak

I ſpeak of a practical Belief, ſuch as influences and governs the Life and Actions; for I do not think that a bare notional Belief of theſe Things would mend the Matter; or, That the Man that ſhould aſſent to them in Speculation, but deny them in practice, would be at all a wiſer Man than he that with heart and mouth denies them: Nor he that is really convinc'd that there are no ſuch Things (if Nature affords ſuch a Monſter) is not more ſo, than he that profeſſes to believe them, but contradicts his Profeſſion by his Life.

For the Object of this practical Belief, I have added a future Judgment to the Exiſtence of a God and his Providence; not only becauſe theſe do inferr that, but becauſe this Judgment is the only thing the Atheiſt would get rid of, and the other are deny'd meerly for the ſake of this, becauſe if they were admitted, this would follow; otherwiſe, I doubt not but he could be very well contented to allow of a God that made the World, if he concern'd himſelf no further with it; and would, without difficulty, give up his eternal Matter, his Fate, or Chance, or any of his lewd Schemes; nay, he could permit him to adminiſter the World too, if he did not take notice of Humane Actions, in order to bring them to an after-Account: He has no Quarrel with a Providence for its governing the World, as is plain from his Argument againſt a Providence; which is, That bad Men, ſuch Wretches as himſelf, are ſuffered to proſper, and be very happy; but this is a wrong he could eaſily forgive him, and could willingly ſubmit to, and acknowledge God's Government here, if he had

had nothing more to ſay to him hereafter: But that he ſhould ſee and keep a Regiſter of his Actions, that he ſhould be privy to his moſt Secret, Cloſet, Curtain, Boſom-ſins, that theſe ſhould all be written in his Book; and, that for this end, That he may bring them all into Judgment: This is what he cannot bear the Thoughts of; and therefore being reſolv'd not to admit of this Doctrine, to him ſo ungrateful and terrible, he is obliged to deny the others from whence this would neceſſarily follow. So far is Fear from being the firſt that introduced a God into the World, that Fear rather firſt made Atheiſts, I mean Fear of a Judgment to come, and the Eternal Retributions to be diſpenc'd in another Life: To which Judgment, and Eternal Rewards and Puniſhments, I ſhall have a ſpecial reſpect in the proof of the Propoſition I have undertaken; which is,

That whether a Man be convinc'd, or not, of the Being of a God, of a Providence, and Future Judgment; yet not to believe them with the heart, ſo as to practiſe and live according to ſuch a Belief, and to ſay with the mouth, That there are no ſuch Things, and infuſe ſuch Notions into others, is a very great Folly.

The Subject in this Propoſition, is a Man not convinc'd of the Being of a God, a Providence, and Future Judgment; and a Man may be ſaid not to be convinc'd of theſe Things, who is in doubt concerning them, whether they be or not: He ſees Reaſons and Difficulties on both ſides, that he cannot fully aſſent to either; or, he may be ſaid not to be convinc'd of the Truth of one part of the Contradiction, who is

fully ſatisfied and perſuaded of the other; the former Sence is more agreeable to the common way of ſpeaking, but the other is juſtifiable by a very uſual Figure.

That which is affirm'd in the Propoſition of this Man, conſiſts of Two Parts.

1. 'Tis a great Folly for him not to believe practically the things therein ſpecified.

2. A great Folly to ſay there are no ſuch things, and to endeavour to perſuade others ſo.

1. In arguing the former of theſe, I will conſider the man as not convinc'd in the firſt Sence I propoſed, as being in ſuſpence whether there are ſuch things or not, the Arguments and Objections appearing to him as ſtrong on one ſide as the other, and prove him to be a Fool if he does not ſo believe them himſelf, as to practiſe accordingly as ſuch a Belief will direct and oblige.

2. In ſpeaking to the ſecond, I will conſider him as not convinc'd of theſe things in the other Sence, *i. e.* as being fully, and without doubt aſſured of the contrary, and prove, that for ſuch a one to infuſe his Notions into others, and endeavour to make Proſelytes is a very great Folly.

1. I will conſider him as in ſuſpence, and doubting whether theſe things are or not; and this muſt be the Caſe of any Atheiſt that can think, and does do it: For although he will not allow that we can demonſtrate theſe things, he cannot deny that we have very probable Arguments for them; and that is at leaſt as much as he can produce to the contrary: For will he ſay, that the Arguments taken from the

the Frame and Origin of the World; from the Structure of Man's Body, and the Faculties of his Soul; from the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of their ſeveral Parts, and their conſtant acting for ſome end and attainment of them; That theſe do not make it very probable that there was ſome Thinking and Wiſe Being, that made, deſign'd, and diſpos'd them for their reſpective Ends? Will he ſay, That his contradictory Notion of the Eternity of the World, his ſenceleſs Hypotheſes of Neceſſity or Chance, are a more likely account of them? Will he ſay, That the Arguments taken from the Miracles that have appear'd in the World, the Works far exceeding the Bounds and Power of Nature, from the Prophecies which have diſtinctly foretold the moſt contingent and arbitrary things, with their particular Circumſtances at the greateſt diſtance, and have been punctually fulfilled, from the Teſtimony, I believe I may ſay, of each particular Man's Conſcience, from the Terrors which even Atheiſts have felt and own'd at the approach of Death or imminent Danger, from all Religions in the World, which however ſilly and idolatrous, are an undeniable Argument of the Faith of the Profeſſors of thoſe Religions in theſe things? In ſhort, from the univerſal Conſent of Mankind, will he ſay, That theſe Arguments are not of weight enough to put in the Balance againſt the trifling Cavils of ſome few Scepticks in an Age, and able at leaſt to keep the Scales even? Be it ſo then, that there are Arguments on both ſides ſo equally poiz'd, that the Man knows not which will turn the Beam, the Affirmative and

Negative equally likely, there may be one that ſees his Actions, and will eternally reward or puniſh him for them, juſt as probably as there may not; and yet he is manifeſtly a Fool if he does not believe there is, whether we conſider his future State, which may be, or his preſent Condition in this World, which is certain.

I. Conſider firſt the Future State which may be; and this is Two-fold; either

1. A State of Happineſs: or,
2. A State of Miſery.

I. Let us begin with the Future Happy State, and the Rewards thereof. Now if it ſhould prove, that there are ſuch a State and Rewards, yet if a Man does not believe that there are, and practiſe accordingly, he cannot poſſibly have them; and therefore he muſt reſolve either to believe and practiſe for them, or to quit all Pretences to and Hopes of them.

To make a true Judgment then, whether it be or be not a Folly not to believe and practiſe ſo, we muſt enquire what thoſe Rewards are, and what damage or hazard ſuch a Belief and Practice may expoſe a Man to: For if there be ſomething certain to be parted with, or adventured for ſomething uncertain, and the thing to be parted from be very valuable, and that for which it is to be quitted, be not ſo, or not much more ſo; in ſuch a Caſe 'tis a madneſs to venture: But on the contrary, where there is a vaſt Advantage on the other ſide, where the uncertain Gain is great, and the thing certain to be hazard-

hazarded comparatively inconſiderable, there not to venture is Folly according to the common Sence of Mankind. All Trade and Commerce in the World are a Proof of this: if it were not ſo, the Husbandman would never commit his Seed to the Ground, the Merchant his Ship and Cargo to the Seas; the Tradeſman truſt out his Goods, or the Gameſter venture his Money, for they all venture ſomething certain for uncertain Gain.

It may be ſaid indeed, that in ſome of theſe Caſes the things themſelves are certain, though they are not ſo of obtaining them; whereas, according to my Suppoſition, the Rewards themſelves of another Life are uncertain: And this is very true. But what's the difference as to me and my venturing for it, between my being certain to obtain a thing, if ſuch a thing there be, but uncertain whether it be or not; and being certain that ſuch a thing is, but equally uncertain whether I ſhall obtain it or not? The Hazard I run in both Caſes is juſt alike. And I dare ſay the uncertainty of the Weather and Winds, the Caſualities of the Sea, the want of Ability in ſome Men, and of Honeſty in others, and the difficulty many times of diſcovering either till too late, are better and ſtronger Arguments to prove the uncertainty of the Husbandman, Merchant, or Tradeſman's obtaining their reſpectively propoſed Gains, than all the Arguments the Atheiſt has or ever will produce, are to prove the uncertainty of the being of Future Rewards: And yet, notwithſtanding theſe Uncertainties, Men think they act very rationally in purſuing the aforeſaid Employments and Trades. If then

the

the Rewards of another Life be of much greater value and consideration than all we are to forego or suffer for the hopes of them, it will be Folly in the general Opinion of the World not to venture for them.

And that they are so, if they are at all, will appear from hence, That they are provided by an infinitely Wise, Powerful, and Good God; and by him proposed as the Sanctions of his Laws, in the doing, or forbearing of the Things commanded, or prohibited; in which Laws all that is to be born or lost, in order to the obtaining them, does consist; I say they are what a Wise Being has proposed as a means to secure Obedience to his Laws, from whence 'twill evidently follow, that they must be more worth than all which that Obedience will cost us; for otherwise they are not a proper means for the obtaining that end, nor can he be a Wise Being that proposes them as such: Nay, they must be not only of greater value than all the Things to be exposed or foregone for their sakes; but of so much greater value, as to be able to balance the Advantage which the presentness of the other gives them over the futurity of these; yea, and to turn the Scales in the impartial Judgment of a rational Creature, if they are proposed by a Wise Law-giver, as a Method to engage the Service and Obedience of such Creatures: Thus much we may gather from the general Notion of such a Reward, and the proportion it ought to bear to the Service, the hazards and losses thereof to which it is annex'd.

But

But we are not left to conclude the Excellency of theſe Rewards only from ſuch general Conſiderations; for they are propoſed to us as ineffably great and glorious, beyond our Conceptions as well as Words; they are repreſented under the moſt affecting Metaphors of Crowns, Scepters, Kingdoms, Thrones, Rivers of Pleaſures; and theſe not temporary, fading ones, but immarceſſible and eternal Enjoyments; not checquer'd with diſappointments and diſſatisfactions, but pure and refined from all diſquieting Alloy. The future Happy State is ſet forth as full of the moſt exalted Satisfactions and Bliſs which an immaterial Soul and glorified Body, purg'd from its droſs and ſpiritualiz'd, can be capable of, where there will be an immunity from all manner of Sorrow, *All Tears ſhall be wip'd away*, and the perfect fruition of all that's good and lovely; of Joys, which nothing can take away, nor any Accident diſturb; of Pleaſures, our deſires whereof ſhall encreaſe by the Enjoyment, and neither have end or period: In ſhort, an eternal freedom from all Evil and Weakneſs, and an endleſs Enjoyment of all Good and Perfection.

And now what preſent thing can there be imagined which any Man in his Wits will not venture, upon the probability of obtaining ſuch a glorious State? Suppoſe even Life it ſelf, and all the Comforts of it, were that which my belief and purſuit after this future State ſhould engage me to loſe; alas, What are they? But ſhort periſhing things, which I muſt, whether I will or not, very ſoon, I know not how ſoon, part from; and will not the probable

Proſpect

prospect of that which is infinite and eternal, compensate for the hazard of that which is but finite and temporal?

And yet, indeed, there is no such hazard that the Belief of a God, and Future State, do ordinarily oblige a Man to; neither Life, nor any of the true Satisfactions thereof, unless in some rare and extraordinary Cases, are thereby lost or endangered; so far from it, that they are rather the things which shorten Life, and disturb the real Pleasures of it, which this Faith lays a restraint upon: None but such shameful, and only seeming Satisfactions, are prohibited by it, which, bating the after-Consequences, a Man's much happier without than with.

But were there some true and real Satisfactions obstructed by this Belief; yet a Man's very Belief and Expectation of these Future Rewards, must needs fill his Heart with far greater Joy than any they rob him of, although they gave him but a probability of enjoying them.

For who is there that does not preferr the Satisfaction, that arises from the hopes of enjoying a large and noble Estate, after the Death of a rich Relation, before the gratifying of a present Inclination? Who that does not willingly deny himself in some things, and break his own Humour, in compliance with the morose Temper of the other; and, at the same time, enjoy greater pleasure in his Mind from the prospect of what he expects, than he loses by that he has deny'd? And yet his Expectation can be no more than probable: His Relation may outlive him, or may change his mind; may take offence at him, how careful soever he

he may be of giving none; or may meet with ſome other, whom he may take a greater fancy to, and think he has more reaſon to make his Heir: Theſe, and many more Accidents, may interpoſe between the Expectant and the Eſtate: So that though a thing be but probable, we ſee the expectation of it can outweigh the preſent uneaſineſs, the uncertain hope abundantly ſatisfies for the certain loſs; and this, where there is no great diſproportion betwixt the Satisfaction deny'd, and that hoped for; this as well as that being but finite; how much more muſt it do ſo, where the diſproportion is no leſs than between finite and infinite, imperfect and perfect? Eſpecially if a Man has embraced a true and firm Faith of theſe Things, and evidenced it to himſelf and the World by a ſuitable practice; what Tranſports, what Exſtaſies of Joy muſt he feel? His Faith, that is ſuch, does as infallibly aſſure him of the Being, the Truth, and Reality of theſe Rewards, as if they were proved to him by Evidence of Senſe and Demonſtration; and from a reflex view of his Life, and comparing it with, and diſcovering its Conformity to the Terms upon which theſe Rewards are propoſed, he finds his own Title to them more firm and better aſſured than any Conveyancer in the World could have made it; and then his expectation muſt be leſs only than the fruition, by that he antidates thoſe future Pleaſures and Glories, and enjoys one Heaven here though he ſhould meet with never another hereafter. What a madneſs is it then, if it be but as likely, that there ſhall be ſuch Rewards as that there ſhall not, not to endeavour by belief and

Practice to ſecure an Intereſt in them; when, if any ſuch there ſhall be, they will ſo very well deſerve all we can do or ſuffer for them, and when this belief and practice are at preſent accompanied with no real damage, but rather attended with ſo much ſatisfaction and pleaſure?

2. Conſider we now the other Future State that may be, the Puniſhments of another Life; and we cannot doubt but if there be a Judgment reſerv'd for bad Men in another World, it will prove a Judgment worthy of God; and indeed the Miſeries thereof are repreſented to us to be as great and durable as the Joys prepared for good Men: Now whether a Man will believe them or not, he muſt within a ſhort time be remov'd from this preſent State and Life; and if there be another, and he has not by belief and practice ſeriouſly endeavoured to ſecure the Rewards of it, the Everlaſting Puniſhments and Miſeries thereof muſt be his Portion; and, in the mean while, what preſent Fears and Torments muſt he be perplex'd withal? For knowing that Hell muſt be his Lot, if there be one; and not being ſatisfied that there is none, he muſt as often as he gives himſelf leave to think of theſe Things, be liable to the moſt ſevere and diſquieting Reflections imaginable: He is ſure of nothing in relation to theſe Everlaſting Torments, but that ſuch there may be; and if they be, he muſt be for ever miſerable in them. Atheiſm indeed he chuſes, and flees to, as an *Aſylum* to ſhelter him from theſe melancholick Reflections:

But

But the Misery of it is, his disbelieving a God will not make him cease to be, if there be one; his damping and extinguishing the Thoughts of a Hell, will not quench its Flames, if a Hell there be; if such things there are, they will be whether he believe them or not, and this he cannot but know; and therefore how effectually soever the Opiats of Wine and Company may operate upon his mind, 'tis not possible for him to secure himself from the most terrifying and amazing Fears in his sober Intervals and private Retirements.

But above all, when a mortal Distemper seizes him; when he is going to *take his great leap in the dark*; when Death arrests him to appear, for ought he knows, before the dreadful Tribunal of that Almighty Judge, whose Being he has deny'd: When in a few hours, it may be minutes, he must be taken hence; and may, for any assurance he can give himself to the contrary, be convey'd thither, where he shall be experimentally convinced of the reality and Severity of those Everlasting Punishments which he has ridicul'd, What Agonies must he then undergo? O, the Horrors of mind which the Atheists feel at the approach of Death! Would they but speak out, as some of them have done, they would own that one hour of that Torment they then endure, is too great a price to pay for a whole Life of sensual and sinful Pleasures. This then is the wise choice and resolution of an Atheist, in relation to the Everlasting Torments of Hell: He is not assured but such a

State there may be; yet he choſes to disbelieve it, and, to run the hazard do I ſay, nay to aſcertain to himſelf an Everlaſting Habitation in thoſe unquenchable Burnings, if any ſuch there ſhall prove to be; and whether there be or not, in the mean time to make ſure of an earneſt of it here, to make a ſort of an Hell within himſelf, and his own Conſcience his Tormentor: ſo wiſely does the Atheiſt act in relation to the future State that may be: But 'tis poſſible there may be no grounds for theſe fears and laſhes of Conſcience; and the after-reckonings, which are the occaſion of them, may prove meer ſhams: Be that admitted, and let us ſee how prudently he acts in relation to his preſent Condition in this World by disbelieving them.

I ſuppoſe I need not prove that the Faith and Belief of theſe Doctrines of a God and Future State, do engage a Man to the practice of all Moral Vertues, with reſpect to himſelf or others, and to the performance of all thoſe Duties which belong to the ſeveral Relations he ſtands in; or that the neglect of theſe, and the doing the contrary, are owing to the disbelief and want of due conſideration of them. Let us try then who is the wiſeſt Man as to the Purpoſes of this World, he who lives in the practice of ſuch Vertues and Duties, or he that gives himſelf up to the contrary; Who is in the Happier Condition here, the Man that holds a hand over his ſenſual Appetites and Luſts, or he that looſes the Reins, and lets them have their Head; he that keeps the maſtery over his Paſſions, or he that makes himſelf a Slave to them; he that maintains

tains the juſt Authority of the Man over the Beaſt, or he that ſuffers the Brute to ride the Man?

The ſober man, that by a ſtrict practice of Temperance and Continence, if not encreaſes, at leaſt preſerves his Eſtate from decay, maintains his body in health and vigour, keeps his mind ſerene and clear, and prolongs his Life, and with it a juſt ſenſe and reliſh of the true Pleaſures of Life; or he, that by Ryoting and Drunkenneſs, by Chambering and Wantonneſs, conſumes his Eſtate, enervates his Body, clouds and weakens his Underſtanding, offers all theſe a Sacrifice, and falls himſelf an untimely Martyr to his Bottle or Strumpet?

The meek man that can bend before a Storm, and ſuffer it to blow over him; or he that by ſtanding up againſt, and ſtiffly reſiſting it, encreaſes its Force and violence, and expoſes himſelf to its fury; he that is not diſordered and ruffled by every affront and little injury, but is ſo truly great as to overlook one, and to forgive the other; that ſuffers not foul and reproachful Language to diſcompoſe his mind, or provoke an acknowledgment that he is gall'd by revenging it on him that gave it; but by the undiſturbed calmneſs of his breaſt, which ſhews it ſelf in his Words and Actions, convinces him that he has thrown away his Dirt upon one on whom it will not ſtick, and confutes the Calumny by deſpiſing it; or he that lets every trivial, it may be only ſuppoſed wrong, diſquiet him and raiſe his Paſſion, every breath of a foul mouth blow up a Storm within him, hurry him on to indecent, and many times dangerous expreſſions of his reſentment, who for having been call'd a Fool will expoſe his Life in revenge of the affront; and

by

by hazarding what is moſt valuable upon ſo trifling an occaſion, juſtifies his Adverſary's Words, and proves himſelf really to be what he was call'd?

Who does beſt conſult his Eaſe and Satisfaction; he that is content with his Condition and State of Life, which he endeavours to make comfortable by a moderate uſe of the good things he enjoys, or he that is querulouſly complaining and repining at his preſent Lot, anxiouſly ſolicitous for the future, that ſpends all his Time and Strength in ſcraping together and heaping up of Wealth, which when he has laid up in never ſo great abundance, he cannot find in his Heart to be ever the better for, but will ſtarve in the midſt of Plenty, and though ſurrounded with Bags and Coffers, endure all the uneaſineſs and miſeries of Poverty, and live poor only that he may die rich?

Who beſt conſults his Profit and Advantage, he that uſes a conſcientious Induſtry in an honeſt Profeſſion or Calling, that lives within Bounds, is vertuouſly frugal, and prudently manages what he has to the beſt advantage, or he that ſpends his time in Sloth and Idleneſs, in Luxury and Extravagance, in Rioting and Gaming?

Who beſt conſults his Reputation and Honour, he that lives in the exerciſe of Juſtice and Probity, Temperance and Sobriety, Beneficence and Charity, Courteſie and Affability, and that does all the Good he can, according to his Circumſtances and Condition of Life, Vertues that make a Man ſhine, and give him a Luſtre in the Eyes and Opinions even of thoſe who do not practiſe them, or he that gives himſelf to Oppreſſion and Cheating, to Luſt and Debauchery,

to

to Sordidneſs and Incompaſſion, to Moroſeneſs and ill Nature, Vices, which they that are guilty of them, are glad to diſguiſe and varniſh over, and aſhamed to own in their genuine Complexion?

Theſe are things that will not bear a diſpute, but a Verdict muſt be given for the former, at the very firſt Appearance at the Bar of Impartial Reaſon. Since then thoſe vertuous Practices, which the Belief of a God and future State, will engage a Man in, are ſo very advantageous in this Life, that he that throws off that Belief, does at the ſame time part with not only all hopes of Happineſs hereafter, but alſo with the great and only certain Inſtrument and Procurer of Happineſs in preſent, we may conclude, that he that believes, that *in this Life only he has hope*, is even as to this Life *of all Men the moſt miſerable*: and therefore he that chuſes ſo to believe, when there are not wanting as ſtrong Arguments on the other ſide to perſuade him to believe otherwiſe and be happy, has certainly the juſteſt Title to the Character in the Text; unleſs perhaps he may lay a better Claim to it, that ſays, not only in his Heart, but with his Mouth, *That there is no God*, and labours to perſuade others ſo: For,

2. He that does that is a very great Fool, although he were fully ſatisfied himſelf, and without all doubt convinced that there is none.

A Man ſo convinc'd has nothing to reſtrain his Appetites, and check his Inclinations, or hinder him when he has Power and Ability from ſerving them, but the fear of the Penalties of Humane Laws, and of what Men may do unto him; and there-

fore

fore may gratifie and indulge himſelf in every thing he deſires, which he can compaſs with ſecurity from them: No Senſe of Duty in any Relation Oeconomical or Civil, can oblige him to the Offices of it, but whenever he's out of the view of the Law, he may break through them as his Intereſt or Inclinations direct: In ſhort, whatever he has a mind to, though never ſo unjuſt or barbarous, if Power, Opportunity, and Privacy favour him, if he can order it that Men may not ſee nor queſtion him for it, he may without any fear or remorſe do it; and the Man who is thus free to follow his own Inclinations, will doubtleſs count himſelf a happy Man: But I'm ſure he's a very great Fool, if he endeavours to perſwade others to be ſuch happy Men for that is to teach them in their turns, when occaſion ſerves, to take the ſame Liberty with reſpect to him, and not to ſtick at any the greateſt Injury to him, that may promote their Advantage, when they can do it without danger of Diſcovery; ſo that how fully ſoever he be perſuaded of his own Liberty, that thoſe inviſible Fetters, of a God, a Providence, and Future State, are but as Threads burnt with Fire, meer Pretences, and nothing elſe, yet 'tis his Intereſt that others ſhould think themſelves bound by them, and conſequently his Folly to labour to undeceive them.

Let us a little conſider this Atheiſt in his ſeveral Capacities and Relations; in his Houſe, inſtructing and ſeaſoning his Family with his excellent Principles; and we may ſuppoſe him diſcourſing to them to this purpoſe, telling his Servants, That he expects only Eye-ſervice from them; That there is no Tye upon

on them to work or be honeſt longer than he ſees or knows what they do; and that whenever they can without his Privity do it, they may ſafely loyter away their time, abuſe his Goods, waſte his Proviſions, purloyn and cheat him of his Money. Telling his Wife, That ſhe's a Fool to think there's any Obligation upon her from her Marriage Vow to reſpect him, or be true to his Purſe or his Bed, but whenever ſhe can with Secreſie do it, ſhe is at Liberty to abuſe either at her Pleaſure. Telling his Children, That there's no Engagement upon them from a God, a Conſcience, a Heaven, or a Hell, (thoſe Bugbears that their Nurſes uſe to ſcare them with) to reverence or obey him; That all the Duty they owe him is grounded meerly upon what they fear or hope for from him; and that whenever they are out of his Power, if they can expect to get nothing by him, they may diſobey and deſpiſe him as they pleaſe; or if there be an Eſtate to deſcend to them after him; if they think he lives too long, they may ſafely wiſh for his Death, and if they can handſomely and privately do it, procure it too. Let us conſider him making Proſelytes of thoſe he trades or converſes with, and this is the effect of his Diſcourſe to them, That they are not ſo wiſe as they ſhould be, if they do not, whenever they can without diſcovery, over-reach him in bargaining, put ill Goods, and falſe Weights and Meaſures upon him, circumvent and cheat him in all their Dealings with him; That there is nothing he has which he values moſt, but if they have a mind to it, and can by open Violence, or by the more ſecret, but no leſs effectual Methods of Perjury or Forgery, Corruption and Bribery, take from him,

and carry the matter ſo that the Law ſhall not take Cognizance of it, they are at liberty to do it, and Fools if they think otherwiſe. Let us conſider him in his Politick Capacity, as a Member of the Community, and ſee how wiſe a Man he is as to that relation, in ſpreading abroad his Principles; by ſo doing he does what in him lies to make Governors tyrannize and oppreſs whenever they have Power: For if there be no Superior inviſible Being to reſtrain them, what ſhould hinder them from exerciſing that Power to what purpoſes they pleaſe? There is not near ſo much danger of perſuading Princes to rule arbitrarily, in telling them *they are accountable to none but God*, as in telling them *There is no God for them to be accountable to.* This is likewiſe to encourage Subjects upon any diſcontent or diſſatisfaction, if they are ſtrong enough to rebell; for if they can overpower their Prince, they have nothing to fear here from him; and if there be no God, there's no Damnation to be received hereafter: This is to break and diſſolve all Bands, and Cement of Humane Society; that which is in it ſelf a moſt likely, and has, generally ſpeaking, been an effectual method for the diſcovering and confirmation of Truth, the ending of Strife, the obliging Men to the Duties of their reſpective Offices, and creating among them a Confidence and Reliance upon one another, is utterly rendred uſeleſs by theſe principles: For tho' the Man that believes a God, a Being of infinite Knowledge, Truth, Juſtice, and Power, can hardly be ſuppoſed in a matter which he knows to be falſe, or never intends to call ſuch a one to atteſt the Truth of what he aſſerts or promiſes, and to puniſh him eternally if he

prevaricates

prevaricates in either: Yet 'tis ridiculous to think this method can be of force to any good purpoſe among Men perſuaded that there is no God; or that they can look upon themſelves obliged to ſpeak truly, or perform what they promiſe, by calling one to be a Witneſs of their Truth, and Revenger of their Falſehood, whom they look upon to be what St. *Paul* ſays of an Idol, *nothing in the World.* What a diſtracted, wild, uncomfortable, and dangerous place muſt a Nation be where ſuch Principles ſhould generally prevail? What a conſtant Watch and Guard muſt Men neceſſarily be upon? What continual Fears and Jealouſies, and diſtruſts of each other muſt they be perplex'd with? What Security can a Man have for his Property, or Life, or any thing he enjoys? I mean a Man of theſe Principles: for he that believes a God, and lives accordingly, has a Security to truſt to, even among a Society of ſuch Devils; for he knows that God that Rules and Commands the infernal Spirits, can govern and reſtrain theſe; and if he does his Duty, he can ſafely truſt himſelf and all his Concerns in his Hands: But the Atheiſt who has no God to hinder him, when he has opportunity, from invading what is another's, has no Providence to ſecure him from the Repriſals which others like himſelf may make upon him.

If then what I have now offered be the genuine interpretation and neceſſary conſequences of theſe Diſcourſes and Principles, as certainly they are, then he who makes it his buſineſs to propagate ſuch Diſcourſes whereever he comes, and inſtil ſuch Principles into others, does very ill conſult his Intereſt in this Life; and he that believes there is never another Life,

and acts so contrary to his Interest in this, may very well pass for a Fool.

I will only beg leave to make two or three brief Inferences from what has been discoursed, and so conclude. And,

1. From what I have now said of the ill influence of Atheistical Discourses and Principles upon Kingdoms and Societies of Men, we may infer the great Obligation that lies upon Princes, and all in Authority, to use their utmost Endeavours for the suppressing of such Discourses, and the rooting out of such Principles among those under their Government: And if the Disease be become incurable in any who have long received the Contagion, and in whom it is grown inveterate, at least to set a Mark upon such, and restrain them from infecting others, as we shut up persons infected with the Plague, and clap a Cross upon their Doors; and this not only for the vindication of the Honour of that God whose Vicegerents they are, and whom they represent, but also for the security of their own Just Authority, and of the Properties, Peace and Happiness of those committed to their Charge; all which are struck at by the direct and immediate tendency of these Principles.

He that teaches Men to be subject to the higher Powers, *not for Conscience sake, but only for Wrath*, teaches them to resist and rebell whenever their strength and numbers can secure them from any dread of that Wrath; and he that persuades Men, That there is no Obligation to abstain from what is their Neighbours, but what the Law lays upon them, no restraint, but want of Ability or Opportunity, does throw down all the Fences, and lay open ever Man's

Property,

Property, to the invaſion of as many as hearken to his Suggeſtions, whenever they are out of the view and reach of the Law, and have Power, and a fair Occaſion favours the Attempt. There's no Conſpiracy ſo dangerous to Sovereign Princes as a Combination of Atheiſts, to ſpread abroad their deſperate Opinions, and make Proſelytes in their Kingdoms; and they whom Neceſſity drives to rob Houſes, or upon the High-way, are but puny Offenders againſt particular Men's Properties, and the Peace of the Community, in Compariſon of them, for they teach Men whenever they can ſecurely be ſo, to be Traitors, Thieves and Murderers upon Principle.

2. If the Character of a Fool does ſo juſtly belong to the Atheiſt, that whoever ſays a Man is an Atheiſt, ſays at the ſame time he is a Fool; this Conſideration I ſhould think, if nothing elſe, ſhould be of force to keep all thoſe whom their Birth and Eſtate, Quality and Circumſtances as to this World, have raiſed above the common level from being Atheiſts, at leaſt from owning themſelves ſuch, and boaſting of it: Theſe are generally more jealous of their Reputations, and ſenſible of any thing that touches their Honour than other Men; and commonly they are not more tender in any thing, nor do feel any reflections more quickly than thoſe that are made upon their Underſtanding: To be called a Fool is an affront they cannot bear, nor is it to be expiated with leſs than the Blood of him that gave it; and can they be content to do that, And is it a thing to be gloried in, which will prove them the greateſt Fools, according to the infallible Oracle pronounced by him who cannot be deceived, and with whom 'tis to no purpoſe,

Poſe, at leaſt to no good purpoſe to be angry? Which will alſo render them ſo in the Opinion of all wiſe Men, who are the only Men capable of Judging? And this Atheiſm effectually does. How induſtrious and zealous then ſhould any that have unhappily laboured under it be to clear themſelves from ſo foul an Imputation? And with what Scorn and Indignation ſhould all that value their Reputations reject the Propoſals and Perſons of ſuch perfidious Wretches, who by infuſing Atheiſtical Principles into them, are robbing them of their Honour, and treacherouſly betraying them into the greateſt Scorn and Contempt? He does not injure a Man's Reputation half ſo much that calls him Fool, as he that perſuades him to be one.

3. Laſtly, If it be Folly for thoſe who are not convinc'd of the Being of a God, and Providence, and Future Judgment, not to believe thoſe things practically, How great muſt their Folly be who being convinc'd thereof, yet live as if they were not? If ſpeculative Atheiſm be Folly practical, Atheiſm is Phrenzy and Madneſs: Let us not then be wiſe only in belief, and Fools in practice, let us not contradict, but ſhew our Faith by our Works.

We profeſs to believe that there is a God, and we do well; let us not give the Lye to our Profeſſion by disbelieving what he has reveal'd, by ridiculing his Word, abuſing his Name, profaning his Day, deſpiſing his Worſhip, and diſobeying his Laws; but let us evidence the truth of our Faith by paying a religious Reverence to every thing on which his Name is call'd, by making it the buſineſs of our Lives to promote his Honour, and by endeavouring what

what we can that his Will may be done by us and by all Men.

We profeſs to believe a Providence that ſees whatever is done throughout the whole Earth, even in the moſt dark and private Receſſes, without the appointment or permiſſion whereof nothing falls out, and which takes care of all things here below, let us not deny it by encouraging our ſelves in Wickedneſs, and crying none ſhall ſee us; by being guilty of Deeds of Darkneſs, and ſaying *Peradventure the Darkneſs ſhall cover us*; by miſimputing the Good or Evil that happens to us to wrong Cauſes; by forgetting, or repining at the Hand from whence they come, by deſponding anxieties for the future, as if there were none that took care of us, by uſing indirect Methods to gain or keep ſufficiency our ſelves: But let it appear that we are in earneſt perſuaded of a Providence, by always acting as in the view thereof; by doing every thing as in his Preſence, *with whom the Darkneſs is no Darkneſs, and the Night as clear as Noon-day*; by looking whenever the Rod is upon us up to him as the wiſe Manager of it, humbly ſubmitting to and kiſſing it; by thankfully acknowledging him as the Author, whatever is the Inſtrument of all the good we enjoy, by doing our Duty, and then faithfully in every Condition depending, and *caſting all our Care upon him who careth for us.*

We profeſs to believe that we have ſome nobler Principle than Matter in us, even ſpiritual Subſtances, which cannot die; Let us not contradict this belief, by making our Bodies the chief Objects of our care, and ſpending our time and labour in looking after carnal and ſenſual Delights, which no more

more belong to immaterial Souls, than Sound do to the Eye, or Colours to the Ear; but let u justifie it, by raising our selves above the little satis factions of Sense, to a Contempt of all those Pleasure which Brutes may share with, and excell us in; an by resolving *to lose the whole World rather than n save our own Souls.*

We profess to believe that *God has appointed a D wherein he will judge the World in Righteousness by th Man whom he hath ordained, who shall come in the Clou of Heaven in the Glory of his Father, with his Angel* to take an account of, *and render to every one accordin to his Works; to those who by patient continuance i well doing seek for Glory and Honour, and Immortalit Eternal Life; but to those who obey not the Gospel, Eter nal Tribulation, and Anguish, and Pain.* Let us no betray the Hypocrisie of our Profession, by neglecting to provide against the coming of our Judge, by ac ing as though we never expected to be call'd to a account; by saying with the evil Servant *Our Lor delays his Coming, and by smiting our Fellow-Servant and eating, and drinking with the drunken*; or by slee ping with the foolish Virgins, and *slumbring while th Bridegroom tarries*; but let us prove the Truth of it, b being upon a constant Watch, by behaving our selve like *Men that wait for their Lord*, being continuall employ'd in his Work and Service, having our accoun always stated, and our Lamps burning, that at wha Watch soever he comes he may find us ready, an *we may enter into his Joy.* Amen.

F I N I S.

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